



State of Utah

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NEWS RELEASE

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Lightning and Wildfires *Lightning Safety Awareness Week Continues*

Although wildfires are not an actual weather phenomenon, wildfires are directly related to lightning and other weather elements. Utah averages about 1,900 wildfires each year. The wildfire threat typically increases in early to mid June across southern Utah and by early July across the northern sections of the state...then usually remains high until around Labor Day. About two thirds of all wildfires in the Eastern Great Basin are ignited by lightning. Many of these lightning caused wildfires occur in the absence of rain, and are the result of what is referred to as "dry thunderstorms." Lightning detection technology provides land managers, firefighters, and weather forecasters with the ability to identify the general location and charge category of each lightning strike. Lightning is often accompanied by strong erratic winds. These winds can quickly turn smoldering organic material into a raging fire. Thunderstorm winds pose one of the greatest dangers to firefighters.

National Weather Service forecasters help land managers and firefighters by producing daily fire weather forecasts during the warm season. "Spot" fire weather forecasts are also provided for those who work on prescribed burns or specific wildfires. Forecasters also issue Red Flag Warnings when the combination of dry vegetation and critical weather conditions will result in a high potential for the development and spread of wildfires. Land managers, in turn, inform the general public of the fire danger in national parks, forests, and other public lands.

During periods of extreme fire danger in forests and rangelands...

- **Avoid being in areas where you might become trapped by a wildfire.**
- **Do not use matches or anything else which could ignite a fire.**
- **Make sure that hot parts of motorized equipment, such as mufflers, are not allowed to come in contact with dry grasses or other potentially flammable material.**
- **If you become trapped or cut off by a wildfire, seek shelter in areas with little or no fuel, such as rock slide areas or lakes.**

In the wildland/urban interface...

- **Maintain a defensible/survivable space using fire-resistant building materials and landscaping techniques.**
- **Have evacuation procedures in place.**

For more information on wildfires and fire safety, check out the following web addresses:

<http://fire.boi.noaa.gov>, <http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/slc/fire>, and <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/gjt/?n=firewx>